

Loma to Westwater

Distance: Approximately 25 miles

Shuttle Time: 1 ½ to 2 hours

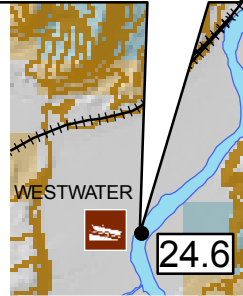
Float Time: 8 to 15 hours, depending on water levels and winds

Difficulty: Class I & II

*** Afternoon winds cause delays and can sometimes be strong enough that boaters must row to continue downstream. With this in mind, day trippers should plan to be at or past Black Rocks by noon.*



Westwater Ranger Station
** No phones or trash pickup
** Permits required beyond this point



Milepoints:

0 Loma Boat Launch, elevation 4440'. Restroom, parking and boat launch. Day use area only, no overnight camping. Please sign in at register before launching.

- 1.6** Between here and Salt Creek the Colorado River flows through Horsetheif Canyon. During the 1890s, rustlers his stolen stock in this area until they'd gathered enough for a drive to Utah. Just down river, the left bank above the high water mark becomes the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness until you reach the Utah/Colorado State line.
- 3.3** Mouth of Rattlesnake Canyon. The natural bridges and arches in Rattlesnake are difficult to reach when coming up the canyon from the river. A hike up the wash is very scenic; including walks between narrow canyon walls.
- 5.9** Large campsite under cottonwoods, river left.

8.6 The confluence with Salt Creek marks the end of Horsetheif Canyon. The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad enters Ruby Canyon via Salt Creek Canyon, then travels along river right to Westwater Valley. This portion of the river was first surveyed for the Denver, Colorado Canyon and Pacific Railroad in the spring of 1889 to determine the possibility of running a railroad along the entire length of the Colorado, through the Grand Canyon and as far as the mouth of the river.

13.7 Mouth of Mee Canyon, large campsite, numerous spires and other slickrock canyon features. Why are the rocks of Ruby Canyon so red? Geologists suggest that the time these redbeds were being laid coincides with a period of abundant plant life. The oxygen put off by the vegetation actually "rusted" the iron oxides contained in the sediments, thus its red color.

15.9 Upper Black Rocks - Class II Rapid. The river makes a sharp left entering a mile long zone of narrow, turbulent water. Take it down the left at the top. At high water watch for weird turbulence, strong eddie lines, suck holes and boils. This area can give the unwary boater trouble, especially in open canoes. BEWARE OF JUMPING OR DIVING OFF ROCKS as people have been trapped and killed by hidden rocks and suck holes. This is a very popular over night stop with several campsites on river left and right. Here the Colorado River cuts through the Uncompahgre Plateau's basement rock, the same 1.5 billion year-old up-lifted metamorphic rock that is seen in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, in Unaweep Canyon southwest of Grand Junction, and at the base of the Colorado National Monument. Geologists call it schist and gneiss, and this same formation creates the rapids of Westwater Canyon. At this point the river is a surprising 85 feet deep. The fast moving, turbulent water is perfect habitat for the endangered Humpback Chub who uses its hump and large wing-like fins as hydroplanes in the swift currents. Chubs are known to travel between Westwater and Black Rocks, possibly using riffles and eddies as spawning habitat.

16.8 Lower Black Rocks and mouth of Moore Canyon. The large popular campsite river left generally fills first.

17.8 Mouth of McDonald Creek Canyon river right. This canyon is a Cultural Resource Management Area protecting the highest concentration of rock art in the vicinity. Camping and fires are not permitted here so visitors can experience it just as it was when it was home to prehistoric people 10,000 years ago. A short hike up the east side of the canyon leads to a rock art site. Please view the rock art from the alcove. Walking on the boulders beneath the panel destroys other rock art figures.

18.0 Mouth of Knowles Canyon river left. This is an extensive canyons system with a large campsite.

20.4 Colorado-Utah state line. Look closely at the cottonwoods along the river from here to Westwater for the Bald Eagles who nest in the area. Backwaters nearby are spawning areas for the endangered Colorado Pikeminnow. For millions of years this fish, which can live for 70 years or more, reigned as the top predator of the Colorado River, reaching weights of 50-80 pounds and lengths of up to 6 feet. Known as the "White Salmon" or "Colorado Salmon" to early settlers, it was once so abundant that it was commercially harvested. Now dams along the river have stopped the annual floods necessary to create its spawning habitat, and changes in the rivers' sediment loads and water temperatures threaten its continued existence.

24.6 Westwater Ranger Station. Take out river right. No phones or trash pickup. Permits required beyond this point.